

THE PERSON BEHIND: "SPIRITUALITY AND CULTS: AN EXPERIENTIAL ANALYSIS"

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In the April issue of The Ground Of Faith journal, I had a long article published, entitled "Spirituality And Cults: An Experiential Analysis." My article described what I referred to as an experiential integral tri-perspective analysis of 17 new age spiritual organizations that I had been involved in over a 30 year period of time. This article is essentially the first chapter of my self-published book "Modern Religions: An Experiential Analysis And Expose," whose remaining chapters consist of my more personal essays describing my experiences in these new age spiritual organizations, which I also refer to as

"modern religions." At the request of one of the editors of The Ground Of Faith journal, I would like to now share with you the motivations and behind the scenes story of my previous Spirituality And Cults article. My story is told in much more detail in my Modern Religions book (c.f. [1]), as the chapters of my book have been the chapters of my life.

My experiences in new age spiritual organizations cover two periods of time. The first time period is roughly from the beginning of 1975, when I first became interested in Scientology, until the beginning of 1980, when I had completed recording my experiences in various at that time recently formed religious organizations, as well as integrating these experiences into my own philosophy of life. The second time period is roughly the ten years from 1995, when I found myself in a romantic relationship with a devotee of Eckankar, to the present time when I am assimilating my explorations of a whole new set of recently formed religious organizations as well as revisiting my process of assimilating my explorations into my philosophy of life. The way in which I began writing about my experiences in these modern religions occurred in the following way. From time to time I would find myself writing a cathartic essay in a stream of consciousness, not having any real purpose except to express myself, after a vivid and emotional experience with some kind of organization that I had gotten heavily involved with. My very first experiential essay I called

"The Natural Dimension and Society," which I wrote in 1975, a few months after my high school teaching experience in the Black and Mexican-American ghettos of Houston, Texas. I asked myself what it meant to be a "natural" human being, a "natural" seeker of knowledge. I was gearing myself more as a teacher, thinking about how to educate our children, but I was in for quite a surprise. For this was the same time that I began to experience the most penetrating, challenging, mind-molding, and also exhilarating educational upheaval of my life up to that time. I am talking about the Church of Scientology of Boston. It was an incredibly stimulating experience for me; before I could even think about what I was doing, I found myself spending 10 hours a day, 6 or 7 days a week, studying the ideas of one man: L. Ron Hubbard. Everybody around me was fanatically believing everything they were being taught. And we

were being taught some extremely unconventional and bizarre things. What kept me from totally losing my own unique selfhood, like so many of my fellow-Scientologists? I kept thinking about the “free mind,” the mind that we were given to explore anything and everything under the sun, no holds barred. With this mind, one should not be

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afraid to delve into anything, including Scientology. With this frame of mind, I took the leap and dared all

the forces of hell to warp my mind. With help from my real friends, especially my ex-wife Diane, I managed to retain my sanity, keep what I began to think of as my “natural dimension,” and eventually reach a point of transcendence and assimilation of Scientology into my conscious awareness, integrating L. Ron Hubbard’s unique philosophy into all that I had previously learned of life.

This integration began in January, 1977 with my first essays “On Scientology” and “The Engram And The Dream” (c.f. [1]). From there, all my essays on Scientology just burst out of me, within a two day period. This was what I had been waiting for--for two years. I felt like publishing all my essays on Scientology right away, but something inside of me said to be patient. I applied to a doctoral psychology program at the Humanistic Psychology Institute, with the intention of writing a dissertation on the relationship of religion to psychology. I decided to seek out other modern religious movements, but this time with a firm purpose in mind: as a student of professional humanistic psychology. With this purpose I took Werner Erhard’s est training in April, 1977 in New York. I became fascinated at how much of est was taken from Scientology. At this time I also recalled the experiences I had had with Reverend Moon’s Unification Church and Guru Maharajji’s Divine Light Mission. I began to see various threads that united these seemingly diverse religious movements, and I became determined to put all the pieces together. I moved to Berkeley, California to begin my doctoral psychology program, pursued my study of est, encountered “Moonies” on the streets, discovered Gurdjieff and Occultism in San Francisco, and became thoroughly familiar with the world of humanistic psychology. I finally decided that my free-style writing form was too dear to me to ever compromise in doctoral dissertation form and regulation, and I therefore decided to indefinitely postpone my goal of becoming a professional psychologist and put all my energies into synthesizing the book that had been such a living part of me all those years. It was during this period of time, from the beginning of 1979 until the end of 1980, that I wrote most of the essays in Chapter 5 of my book, which describes my personal experiences with Judaism, Unitarianism, Existentialism, etc., as well as my semi-autobiographical novel “The Maturation Of Walter Goldman.” Scientology related excerpts of my novel are included in my book because I believe that they illustrate in an authentic, dramatic, and nuts and bolts way my own experience of being immersed in Scientology. My main character Walter has a friend and initial mentor Zachary, who eventually succumbs to his own guru and cult indoctrinations, and is in reality none other than my boyhood friend Richie, the source of all my

writings about Guru Maharajji and

Divine Light Mission in “Modern Religions” (c.f. [1]).

For a number of reasons I did not publish my book or any of my essays at that time. I actually did very little in regard to religion--modern or traditional---for the next 15 years. I opened up my philosophy to the world in the form of a business venture: Natural Dimension Teaching Agency, became a father, got divorced, moved to Maine, bought a house, began my career as a mathematics professor at a small college in

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rural Maine, started doing pure mathematics research that eventually enabled me to earn my Ph.D in mathematics, wrote my mathematics enrichment book: “Numberama: Recreational Number Theory In The School System,” conducted Numberama mathematics enrichment workshops in various places in the United States, and began a sequence of romantic relationships that lasted on the average a year or two. However, as fate would have it, one of these romantic relationships was the stimulation for me to return to the explorations of modern religions that I had begun in my twenties. In 1995 I became involved in a romantic relationship with a devotee of Eckankar, who was also a practitioner of Holographic Repatterning

(c.f. [1]). When this relationship ended in 1997, somehow my inner system was ready to re-explore modern religions, and I gave myself quite the crash course. Summer of 1997 I encountered A Course In Miracles, Self-Realization Fellowship, Avatar, Reiki, Conversations With God, and Neopaganism, and I decided to refer to my re-emergence as “new age spiritual explorations.” After my initial experience of Reiki in 1997 I attended Reiki sharing sessions for about a year, and then two years later I began a three year romantic relationship with a Reiki master--which ended about seven months ago. This three year romantic relationship has been the source of most of my essays on Reiki. Both my Reiki source/ex-girlfriend as well as my son Jeremy have helped me get more current on Scientology, as I describe in my first Scientology essay in “Modern Religions”: “Scientology In The 21st Century” (c.f. [1]).

The perspective that I am coming from in my book is that of an experiential philosopher. I very much believe that philosophy needs to be experienced in the very core of our beings, not just in our intellectual minds. I am in agreement with philosopher Ken Wilber in this regard, and I am currently exploring Ken Wilber’s philosophy and his own philosophical/spiritual organization to express his philosophy in the world: Integral Institute. My book is my way of searching for God, thinking of the term God in a broad sense as First Cause, Primal Energy, etc. My previous Spirituality And Cults article in The Ground Of Faith journal is an illustration of my mathematical organizational skills applied to my personal experiences in the various modern religions or new age spiritual organizations that I have delved into during my life. But the essential basis for all of my spiritual studies is my own search for authentic spirituality, which can be alternatively described as my search for why I am here, for the meaning of my

life, or in my own way—
for God.

REFERENCES

- 1) Elliot Benjamin, “Modern Religions: An Experiential Analysis And Expose” (Swanville, Maine: Natural Dimension Publications, 2005; available by contacting author at: ben496@prexar.com)